

Assertive Communication Skills

Being **Assertive** means communicating to others with respect, but getting across to them what you need...so standing up for yourself while using respectful language that not only tells the other person that you respect them, but that you are a person to **be respected** by them also.

Easier said than done? Maybe. It does take some practice and getting used to, but it is not as hard as you may think.

First some basic information (which you probably already know, but have never really examined closely):

Primary Emotions Vs Secondary Emotions

If you have never been told that anger is a secondary emotion then this takes a little time to digest...but underneath anger are many other emotions, and they are called primary emotions. Hurt, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise are examples of primary emotions. Because they may lead to emotions like anger, then anger is referred to as a secondary emotion. In order to communicate assertively we must tap into the primary emotions within ourselves and not cover them up.

Avoid Creating Defensiveness in Others simply by changing the way you say things. There are some words, phrases, or ways of speaking that people commonly use...but they create instant defensiveness which defeats your purpose in communicating assertively! The most common ones are:

1. I told you so.
2. Absolute language such as "Always", "Never", "Everyone", "Nobody" etc. The world is dynamic and imperfect, and so are we. There is rarely a situation that is absolute, yet we hear absolute statements from people a lot...Thing is, when you say something out loud, your brain hears you say it...and works really hard to defend your position and make that statement true! So you create an impossible situation for yourself from which it is really hard to back down!

3. "You" statements that are accusatory or label (ie. You Jerk!...You lied...stole...made me...You are...etc.)
4. "At Least..." (which minimizes the other person's pain while hijacking the conversation)
5. Enlisting the help of others who may think the same way as you...against the other person (So and so...agrees with me and thinks you are...)
6. "Should"-ing on them (You should have...or could have)

Okay, so with those things out of the way, here is the format for an Assertive Discussion:

I feel (.....) (Fill in the blank with a **primary** emotion).

When you (.....) (Specific behaviour...avoid creating defensiveness)

I understand (.....) (How you see the situation from **their** perspective)

I would like (.....) (State what you need)

This is important to me because (.....) (Your perspective)

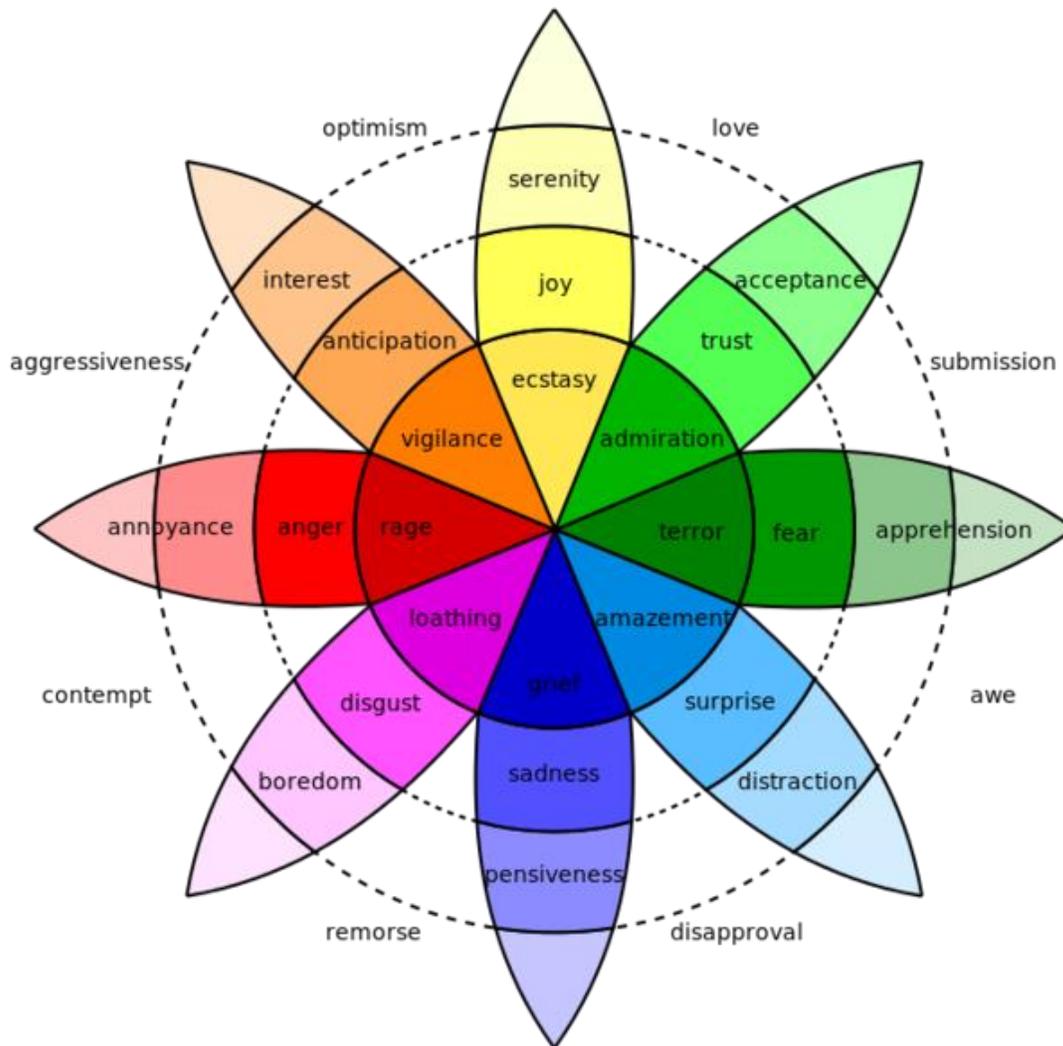
Some alternatives are (.....) (Ideas you have come up with to resolve this issue)

Example:

I feel neglected when you go out with the guys and don't call home. I understand that they have been your friends for many years, but I would like it if you could let me know before I cook supper, that you are not going to be there. This is important to me because it affects what I choose to take the time to cook, I worry about you when you don't show up, and I feel that I'm not important to you when I finally realize where you are. If you cannot give me any notice because it is a spur-of-the-moment decision, could you phone me when you decide to go out with them? Even if you don't think you'll be long?

Practice scenarios for you to roll-play with a friend: Your child pushes another child to be first in line. Your boss tells you he wants that report by

tomorrow morning. Your spouse let you down (again). Your neighbour asks you for money knowing that you are having financial difficulties yourself.



In 1980 Robert Plutchik constructed a wheel-like diagram of emotions visualising eight basic emotions, plus eight derivative emotions each composed of two basic ones.

Source: Psychology Today, Neel Burton M.D. What Are Basic Emotions? Posted 7 January 2016